

THE MOTORCYCLE BARBARIANS

By GEORGE NOBBE

WEST PALM BEACH, FLA., Dec. 2—They're dirty, hairy and obscene. They're complete social dropouts, snarlingly against everything the square world is for. And they can be savage, so savage that five of them are accused of nailing a girl's hands to a tree because she couldn't come up with \$10 when the gang wanted it.

These are the Outlaws, a sex-flaunting, chain-wielding band of motorcycle toughs whose forays through Florida have provoked Gov. Claude Kirk's personal pledge to run them out of the state.

So far, the nomadic gang, offshoots of California's Hell's Angels, have been charged with or implicated in prostitution, narcotics, car theft, stolen credit cards, bad checks, phony money orders, grand larceny and chain whippings.

But it was the crucifixion two weeks ago of 18-year-old Christine Deese of West Palm Beach that really brought the wrath of Gov. Kirk down on the Outlaws.

The freckle-faced, redhaired girl was nailed by both hands to a tree branch, her toes barely reaching the ground, in a remote woods near Jupiter, Fla.

Five silent grinning Outlaws sat in a semi-circle in front of her, watching for 15 minutes, police said, before they finally pulled out the 4-inch nails and let her go.

Names Assailants

The terrified girl, who at first told police and hospital doctors that she had fallen on a board with nails in it, reluctantly accused James (Spider) Owings, 25, of Tampa, and Frank (Fat Frank) Link of Cypress, Calif. Both were picked up by West Palm Beach sheriff's deputies within hours.

The other three were arrested last week in a Detroit clubhouse the Outlaws share with another gang, the Renegades.

They are John (Crazy John) Wables, 24, of Warren, Mich., who sports a gold



Bar owner Kitty Randall and Outlaw motorcycle club president Donald (Duke) Tanner. The Outlaws got a personal pledge from Florida's governor to run them out of the state.

ring in his nose, Joseph (Super Squirrel) Sorshy Jr., 19, of Houston, and Donald (Blangy) Graves, 18, of Detroit.

With Florida's tourist image in the back of his mind, Gov. Kirk got out of bed at 2:30 last Monday morning and flew down from Tallahassee to be on hand when the three Outlaws reached West Palm Beach.

In an airport waiting room, he bluntly laid it on the line for the West Palm Outlaws as well as similar groups that have operated for the last seven months in Tampa, St. Petersburg and Fort Lauderdale.

"We are not going to tolerate your kind in Florida any more. You left that girl hanging to a tree and I want to make an example of this thing," Kirk said.

With that, the three Outlaws kissed, a tribal custom usually staged only when there are photographers around, and were driven off to the county jail to join Link, Owings and five other gang members, not as yet implicated in the crucifixion.

Cycle Veteran

They include the club president, Donald (Deke) Tanner, 26, a New Bedford, Mass., veteran of at least seven similar motorcycle gangs across the country; convicted killer John P. Luke II; and three girls, Katherine Elizabeth Stroh and Ernestine Josephine Popp, both 18, and Tanner's pregnant wife, Penny, 22.

All of them are charged with possession of marijuana. Tanner, who got his nicknames from preaching in the Army, and Katherine, a onetime supermarket cashier, also are accused in the theft of \$8,700 from her employer.

Bail, which has reached \$24,000 in Tanner's case, has been denied most of the Outlaws by local bondsmen whose insurance companies are no longer willing to take a chance on the gang.

FLORIDA'S troubles with them really began a year ago, when four members of the now defunct Hell's Angels, including Luke, invaded a migrant labor camp in Pompano Beach.

They were seeking revenge for a beating given two club members near the camp, but in the brawl that followed, an 11-year-old girl, Catalina Flores, was shot and killed, apparently by mistake.

The result was that three of them, including Luke, who is appealing his sentence, got 5 to 10-year jail terms.

Another, James Purkhiser, faces death in the electric chair. Thus the Florida branch of Hell's Angels was summarily dissolved.

Last spring, however, Deke Tanner roared into West Palm Beach on what the Outlaws call a "chopped hog," a stripped down, severely modified Harley-Davidson motorcycle worth close to \$2,500 and capable of speeds up to 150 miles an hour.

Sheriff William Heidtman says Tanner's assignment from the club's national leadership—it supposedly has 1,100 members—was to reorganize the renegade cycle clubs in Florida under the colors of the Outlaws. He set about it with a vengeance.

His recruits came from several gangs, the Iron Cross Club, the Half Breads, the Cossacks and the Outcasts, to name a few, and soon itinerant riders began arriving from Michigan, Illinois, Kentucky, California, Tennessee, Texas and Indiana.

Some of the existing clubs were absorbed by the Outlaws. Others, like the Outcasts, retained a certain autonomy, riding with the Outlaws from time to time while maintaining a separate club structure.

OUTCAST leaders Edward (Chopper) Jones and Ernest (Speed) Stevenson, sometimes known as "Tampa's No. 1 vagrant," drummed up enough support for independence to defeat a merger proposal by five votes.

The organization methods Tanner used were right out of the Hell's Angels' handbook. If the milder-mannered local clubs didn't like them, they never uttered a word.

The erstwhile Army "deacon" set up a clubhouse in a seedy roadside beer joint, called Kitty's Saloon, on Route A1A a dozen miles north of West Palm Beach in June.

The owner, a bleached blonde named Bertha (Kitty) Randall, a mother of three who is separated from her husband, wasn't given a chance to select her customers. They just moved in. Business hadn't been too good anyway, so she rented a dozen motel-style efficiency cabins behind the building at \$10 a week each and tossed in the use of a huge, cement-block warehouse for nothing.

The Outlaws' insignia, called "the colors," is a skull and crossed pistons. The uniform consists of a sleeveless denim jacket without a shirt underneath, or

a leather jacket, worn with levis held up by a belt of heavy steel cycle drive-chains, and boots.

All this is smeared with the requisite amount of oil and grease and bears the standard trappings:

Swastikas; Iron Crosses; such sentimental slogans as "Santa Claus Is Dead"; the number 15, which stands for the letter M, thirteenth in the alphabet, and means its wearer uses marijuana; a patch reading "1%er," indicating its owner helps comprise that tiny minority of American motorcyclists who just don't care about law and order; and a whole array of symbols and numbers standing for a variety of sexual peculiarities.

To join, the applicant has to own a bike, although non-owners are occasionally accorded probationary status, especially if the club treasury is running low.

Low Dues, Too

Dues are \$2 a week, supposedly to pay for parties, although in recent months all the spare cash has gone to bail club members out of jail.

In addition to Tanner, the Outlaw hierarchy includes a pair of vice presidents, a secretary and two sergeants-at-arms, called enforcers, who make sure club decisions are promptly carried out.

Membership fluctuates between 35 and 50 members. Most of them don't work except for casual jobs as mechanics.

The girls they attract, called "old ladies," turn over the money they earn as salesgirls, cashiers, beauticians, secretaries or whatever in return for the privilege of club acceptance. It's a tidy income. Tanner, for instance, claims he hasn't worked since reaching Florida.

"Why should I?" he is fond of bragging. "I got four old ladies giving me their money every week."

And that's not all they give, according to club members who say that three to a bed is not unusual in the motorcycle jungle, where an old lady survives only by being obedient.

If two Outlaws want to stake their old ladies on a game of pool, the loser's girl goes along with the decision just as she would if her own old man sold her for a week to raise money for some motorcycle parts.

Fifty dollars is the going rate for a weekly rental, says Chief of Detectives William Bennett, who also described a

unique sexual endurance event, called a "train", involving any number of males and one girl.

For a girl to complain about this sort of thing is to risk the fate of Christine Deese.

Reporters found out how deeply ingrained female discipline is when they interviewed the few girls who would talk about the crucifixion. One pretty, 22-year-old snarled venomously, "They should have nailed her feet, too."

According to Bennett, the Outlaws aren't above sending their old ladies down to Miami to raise cash as prostitutes in the shoddier hotels that the syndicate isn't interested in.

"When an Outlaw tells one of his old ladies to go out and get some money, he doesn't care what she does to get it, but she knows she has to come back with something," Bennett said. "Christine didn't, and look what happened."

Oddly, most of the old ladies come from respectable middle-class families.

Why do they take up with the Outlaws? "These people live from day to day," Sheriff Heidtman said. "They don't look ahead and they don't worry about the future. The girls see some sort of strange glamor in the dangerous way these people live."

"They like the one-for-all and all-for-one attitude, and they fall for the line that these guys are willing to die for one another."

PRESUMABLY, the girls don't mind the Outlaws' scatological initiation ceremonies, bizarre rites that involve rubbing urine and excrement on the jacket insignia of the new member. The unwritten law that a member can steal anything he wants for his bike except an engine—which can be traced—doesn't disturb them either, nor do the savage chain whippings that make gang rumbles bloody affairs.

Florida police began to move in on Kitty's Saloon when neighbors complained about the thunderous bellow of the juke box and the roar of the Outlaws' bikes doing one-wheel takeoffs, called wheelstands, in the parking lot.

Kitty's was kept under constant surveillance, with a prowler in the parking lot at nightfall. Outlaws foolish or stubborn enough to venture on the highway on their bikes were harassed with traffic tickets that cited them for driving without crash helmets and goggles.

Tanner became so incensed that he



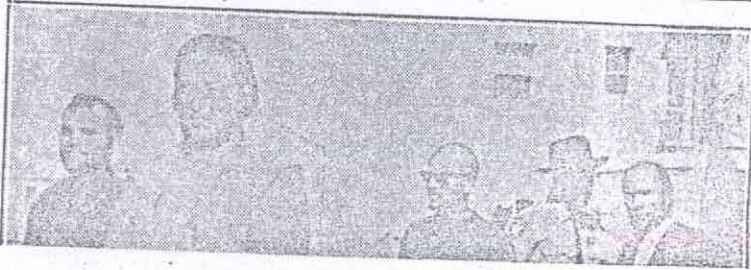
Accused in crucifixion and arrested after they fled to Detroit were Donald (Mangy) Graves, John (Crazy John) Wables and Joseph (Super Squirrel) Soraby Jr., l. to r. above. Taken from them by Sheriff William Heidtman, who holds 12-inch dagger, were chain belts being examined by Gov. Claude Kirk. On floor are jackets emblazoned with Outlaws' insignia, called "colors" [→].



stormed into the sheriff's office early in November and, reading from a small notebook, reeled off a list of grievances that ended in this ringing denunciation: "The West Palm Beach cops don't wear crash helmets and if they don't I'm not going to. What's good for the goose is good for the gander. There are a thousand people in the Outlaws and if they can't come to visit me without getting busted before they get off their bikes, it's a cover day."

Billie Haskell, whose husband, Gino, is in the county jail for using obscene language during one police raid, put it this way: "I never saw any marijuana, my old man never beat me up. "There's a lot of people going around saying we had orgies up here and all that—but not when I was around. All the trouble started when Duke brought in those guys from out of town. Sure, some of them were pretty weird, but

SOME OF THEM WERE PRETTY WEIRD BUT



"You think that if you get a thousand cycles down here they'll be hard to control and you're right."

In one raid that followed this outburst, Heidtman claimed the Outlaws had put three lookouts on the roof of the bar, armed with automatic rifles. In another, a badly frightened deputy fired a shot at Tanner's feet because he said the Outlaw chieftan had threatened him with a chain belt when he tried to stop him from putting up a sign that read: "Private property. Trespassers will be shot."

Cops Lock Club

Just before Thanksgiving, the state closed Kitty's place, accusing her of maintaining a disorderly house. They also closed several of her cabins on the grounds that they were filthy.

The move came in the wake of one of those flying visits to West Palm that Gov. Kirk is fond of.

It was the crucifixion that had brought him, but the sight of girls' names scrawled in paint above a half dozen beds in the clubhouse at the back of the saloon did just as much to shatter his composure.

The dispossessed Outlaws promptly moved into Tanner's house on Shawnee Drive in the West Gate section of the city until he and a half dozen more were arrested there in a narcotics raid.

Some of the Outlaws still live on Kitty's property in the few cabins that weren't shuttered. Kitty herself is furious at the sheriff, the Governor and anyone to do with the law.

She called the Governor an "uncouth bally." "I'm being put right in the middle," she said. "I owe \$1,500 in taxes, I have a mortgage payment coming up, I've got three kids who aren't going to have any Christmas because there isn't any money coming in."

"These kids aren't as bad as people say they are," she said in an interview last week in her Jumo Beach home. "There were a few bad ones, sure, schizos, I guess, but I never had any trouble with them."

"They say there was a lot of marijuana in my place, but I never saw any. Anyone could come in and have a beer and nobody would bother him if he didn't bother them."

"I sold more soda than I did beer, and then they come along and take my place away."

anybody they beat up had it coming, he was looking for trouble."

"So they wear swastikas, and all that. So do the surfers and no one bothers them," she said, looking wistfully at the three high-powered bikes that remain on Kitty's property, awaiting their jailed owners.

"We told the girl [Christine Deese] to go home," Billie said, "but she wouldn't. She knew what was going to happen to her, she knew before she got in the car and she went."

"She was some kind of masochist or something," Kitty put in, groping for the word. "She was always getting beat up and she'd keep coming back. She wouldn't listen to me."

BIG JIM NOLAN, an Outlaw vice president from Fort Lauderdale and a New Jerseyan with two years of college before he went south 12 years ago, blames politics and Gov. Kirk.

"So we have long hair and beards. Well, so did Jesus Christ and he's been around a lot longer than Gov. Kirk. He's a lot of mouth. So he closed up Kitty's, big deal, so he's got 18 upright citizens now," he said, alluding to the Outlaws' membership rolls.

'We're Not Hippies'

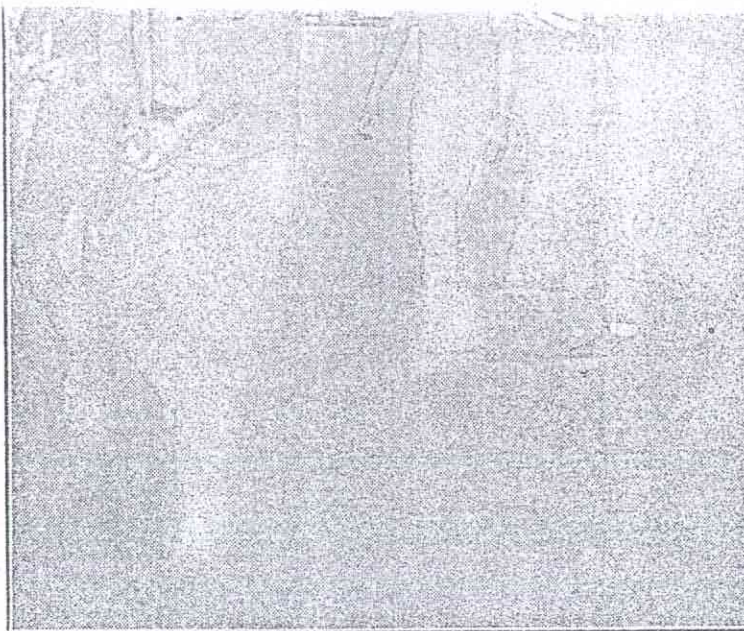
"I'll give you a stone quote. Maybe we're not the sweetest people in the world, but we're people. We're not a bunch of hippies and we're not burning up our draft cards. I got mine and a lot of the guys have been in the service."

"It gets cold up north, that's why we came down here. All we want to do is be left alone and ride our bikes. We're bike people. If we beat up as many people as they say we have, every punk who's wise or belligerent, we'd be punching up 24 hours a day."

"The only mistake we made was having our club in a public building. Florida's a very bad place to do anything. You get in a fist fight in a bar in New York and nobody says anything. Down here it can cost you 10 or 15 years of your life."

"All we want to do is fix up our putts [cycles] so they don't look like anybody else's. That club, it's just something to collect to," he said.

Big Jim, who as an Outlaws officer spends most of his time trying to collect bail money for his friends, ridicules tales of sexual perversion and orgies as "hogwash."



Sheriff's deputies lead four chained and handcuffed Outlaws into county jail in West Palm Beach. They are, l. to r., James (Spider) Owings, Frank (Fat Frank) Link, John (Shades) Luke II, and Tanner, in dark sweater.

"Look, the governor comes barging into Kitty's and he sees that swastika on Deke's jacket and he says, 'What do you do for a living?' Well, Deke's a little tired of questions like that, so he says, 'Who, me? I'm a pimp.'"

"Well, that has no type of meaning whatsoever. It's just to blow his mind, but the Governor believes it, that's the real mind snapper."

"We're just playing games with their minds. Deke and Shades [John Luke], they're playing all sorts of funny games with the citizens. They'll say anything. Like Speed, when they picked him up, he said, 'If you want to talk to me about tacking that chick to a tree, you're outta your mind.'"

"That's what all the swastika stuff is about, and the kissing, it's just to shock the citizens because they won't leave us alone."

"Deke, he goes over to Sebring on Labor Day and gets busted just because he's on a bike instead of in a Ford wearing a turtle-neck sweater."

Ask him about the crucifixion and Big Jim explains:

"In any group you're gonna have somebody messing up. Just because there are a couple of nuts up there doesn't mean we all go around nailing people to trees. If I'd been there, I would have stopped it. This is one big nightmare."

For Christine Deese, the nightmare has just begun. One hand is infected, both are partially paralyzed and the police are holding her in protective custody.

Last week, an anonymous telephone caller told the sheriff:

"When that girl gets out, her life won't be worth a plugged nickel."